

# **Director's Report to the Fish and Wildlife Commission**

**February 1-2, 2008**

***“A Sound Stewardship of Fish and Wildlife”***

We serve Washington's citizens by protecting, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats, while providing sustainable fish and wildlife-related recreational and commercial opportunities.

**Fish and Wildlife Goal:**

***Achieve healthy, diverse and sustainable fish and wildlife populations and their supporting habitats***

## **Title: Sprague Lake Regulation Change Proposal -**

Biologists from both the Fish and Wildlife Programs met in Ephrata during late January to review a fishing regulation change proposal for Sprague Lake in Lincoln/Adams counties. The proposal would re-establish a seasonal fishing closure from the western point of Harper Island to the southwest end of the lake. The purpose would be to enhance waterfowl protection within this portion of the lake during winter and early spring. This group also discussed a proposal to establish a closed fishing buffer area around Harper Island to protect shore birds (terns and gulls) utilizing the island for nesting. Issues being evaluated relative to these proposals include loss of fishing opportunity and wildlife protection needs. If a proposal were moved forward it is anticipated that it would be submitted during the 08/09 minor regulation cycle.

## **Title: Planning for Climate Change –**

The Coastal Infrastructure Preparation and Adaptation Work Group (CI-PAWG) submitted a final list of recommendations for the state's draft climate change strategy. The CI-PAWG focused on strategies to enhance the ability of state and coastal communities and ecosystems to prepare and adapt to impacts of sea level rise (SLR) and other climate change impacts. Specific recommendations addressed the need to: 1) review and potentially revise current land use regulations, 2) improve mapping and characterization of SLR vulnerability for coastal areas, 3) incorporate SLR considerations into coastal habitat protection and restoration strategies, and 4) include best available data on SLR into coastal facility construction and maintenance planning. Additional recommendations included the need to continue multi-party coordination and strategy discussions, sponsor or conduct educational programs on climate change and SLR, and develop a state program with funding to support agency staff focused on climate change and SLR issues.

## **Title: Flood Damage Work-**

The Forest Habitat Section and Forest and Fish biologists have been working closely with the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Ecology to coordinate our response to the wind and flood damage caused by the December 2007 storm event. We have focused our efforts on allowing some removal of blowdown in order to hasten the restoration of a fully functioning riparian zone. We are also discussing the possibility of eliminating or minimizing electroshocking efforts within watersheds that have been impacted by debris flows and/or flooding. This effort is necessary to protect fish that were likely impacted by this storm event and prevent landowners from moving the Type F stream breaks downstream to locations where they find the last fish.

**Title: Outer Coast Protection Strategies –**

Staff completed the work on a proposal for modifying oil spill response procedures on the outer coast. The new procedures will result in more efficient deployment of outer coast protection responses. The proposed plan recognizes the difficulties of providing protection for fish and wildlife resources in such a remote area, and it prioritizes booming strategies based on biological significance and accessibility. Revised geographic response plans for the outer coast and the Strait of Juan de Fuca have been drafted. Both draft plans have been sent to our state, federal, and tribal co-trustees for an initial review, and both documents should be released for public review in January.

**Title: Remove and Set Back Dikes Along the Yakima River -**

THE DEPARTMENT provided a letter of support for the “Gap to Gap Partnership” within the cities of Union Gap and Yakima. Staff has participated in this partnership for the past few years and we are jointly submitting a request to Congress for funding to remove and set back dikes along the Yakima River within these two cities. This letter of support will be followed by a MOU that will lay out goals and objectives of the partnership including: increasing flood capacity, reducing flood elevations, reducing erosive force of the river against levees and bridges, improving fluvial processes and functions within the floodplain, and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat. The Department's role will be to provide technical support for fish, wildlife, and habitat surveys and restoration efforts. This effort is likely to restore more than 1,000 acres of Yakima River floodplain within an urban area.

**Title: Land Acquisition Prioritization -**

Region 3 Habitat Program and Wildlife Program staff are prioritizing critical habitat needs throughout the region in response to the next funding cycles for WWRP, Bonneville Power Administration, and other grants that fund habitat protection and acquisition. Unfortunately, there are several large tracts of critical habitat that provide key linkages necessary to sustain ecological connectivity between existing, privately owned shrub-steppe and forest habitat blocks that are at high risk of sale and subdivision. Staff is assessing risk of development, opportunity for acquisition, and habitat function and value to ensure that habitat of greatest value and risk are protected with the limited funds available.

**Title: 2008 Lands 20/20 Proposals –**

Twenty-seven acquisition project proposals that would seek funding in 2008 were received last week. These proposals will go through an internal review on February 6 and on February 23. The Lands Management Advisory Council will evaluate the projects for recreational benefits, and then the Commission will review projects approved through this process in March.

**Title: WAFWA Joint Meeting of Habitat and Private Lands Access and Conservation Committees:**

Staff attended the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting with other western state representatives to begin discussions on future Farm Bill Program implementation and how to ensure that the new "Open Fields" program incorporates a habitat conservation component.

**Title: Region 5, Mount St. Helens Wildlife Area Emergency Winter Feeding Preparations -**

The Wildlife Area Manager and Assistant Manager have been making preparations for the implementation of an emergency winter feeding operation on the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area. At this time, it is expected that hay will be delivered on January 28, 2008, with feeding operations expected to commence immediately thereafter.

**Title: Fisher Reintroduction -**

The first reintroduction of twelve fisher (a native member of the weasel family) was conducted this past week. Fisher are known to be effective predators on porcupine. The twelve were captured earlier this winter in British Columbia and transported by the Department and Olympic National Park personnel to the Elwha River area and to Hurricane Ridge. This was the first of several releases to occur over the next three years. Another release is scheduled for late this winter, after more fisher are trapped in British Columbia. It was quite a media event with a number of young students helping with the release.

**Competence Goal**

***Implement processes that produce sound and professional decisions, cultivate public involvement and build public confidence and agency credibility***

**Title: Salmon Funds Benefit North Central Washington Lands -**

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board granted \$2.7 million out of more than \$60 million statewide to salmon recovery projects in Chelan and Okanogan counties. One project being funded reconnects a relic side channel and floodplain to the Entiat River on DEPARTMENT property. The county plans on removing a levee, excavating the channel to allow the river to flow into it, and adding logs to provide shelter for fish. A diversion structure will also be placed in the main stem of the Entiat River to redirect the river toward the side channel. Another project will breach a levee near Dryden and allow the Wenatchee River to flow into nearly two acres of floodplain. The largest Chelan County grant (\$650,000) will be used to convert about 1.8 miles of the Peshastin Irrigation District canal from an open canal to a closed pipeline. The construction of a pipeline will eliminate leaking, saving an estimated 9 gallons per second of water for Peshastin Creek. The water savings will result in reduced diversions from Peshastin Creek and enhanced passage for chinook salmon and bull trout. The county will contribute \$225,000 in local, state and federal grants and donated labor. Finally, funds for the Methow Conservancy will be used to purchase conservation easements along the Methow River so that land development will not occur in critical habitat in the future.

**Title: Emergency Bank Stabilization on Mountain Loop Highway, Snohomish County-**

Snohomish County Road Maintenance requested emergency approval to stabilize approximately 100 feet of bank that is sloughing into the South Fork Stillaguamish River along the Mountain Loop Highway east of Granite Falls. This is a location with chronic environmental concerns as the river heads directly toward the highway. An emergency Hydraulic Project Approval was issued to provide the needed repair and to incorporate the large woody debris that fell into the river as a result of the bank erosion. Snohomish will re-visit the site later this spring to evaluate a more long-term solution to the persistent problem.

**Title: Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council –**

The Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS) Advisory Council met Friday, January 11, 2008, to discuss an update on the wave energy buoy project in Makah Bay. Finavera was recently issued a FERC license that allows a feasibility demonstration project for five years in Makah Bay. Finavera is now working with the OCNMS and state/local governments to obtain the necessary permits to begin installation. One topic of concern is whether the transmission cable from the buoy to the shore will be anchored to the substrate or allowed to move freely. There is also interest in working collaboratively with Finavera to develop the required monitoring plan. While all interests support the development of this alternative energy source, this project has united seemingly divergent interests in the effort to ensure potential impacts of the project are well studied. The Department's Habitat Major Projects is the lead for this project.

**Title: Stevens County Cattlemen's Association – Wolf Awareness -**

A Stevens County Cattlemen's Association meeting was held in Colville, Washington, on Saturday, January 19, 2008. One staff attended. The cattlemen had invited several individuals who have been affected by wolf recovery in Idaho to speak about their experiences. These included ranchers, outfitters, and Federal Wildlife Services staff from Idaho. About 250 people were on hand for the presentations.

**Science Goal:**

*Promote development and responsible use of sound and objective science to inform decision-making*

**Title: Puget Sound Steelhead Mortality Studies –**

Research planning is underway to evaluate selective fishing related questions for Puget Sound steelhead sport fisheries. In the Samish Basin, Fish Science researchers are coordinating with regional managers and biologists to estimate the post-release survival for wild winter steelhead following their capture by sport gear. This will be done by surgically implanting radio tags in winter steelhead treatment and control groups.

In the Snohomish Basin, we are also teaming with regional experts, in this case to estimate the ratio of hatchery and wild steelhead that are encountered during the steelhead sport fishery.

**Title: Hatchery Database Project – FishBooks –**

A hatchery Web-based data entry system is in the final stages of development and will be deployed in the summer of 2008. The system will be a comprehensive program, capturing information on rearing, release, and broodstock collection. The criteria used for development were from Hatchery Scientific Review Group recommendations and are designed to meet requirements for managing for success. There are 22 hatchery facilities currently testing the program. During this spring there will be advanced testing before final deployment.

**Title: Dungeness Crab Mating Study –**

In collaboration with the Suquamish Tribe, staff from Regions 6 and 4 conducted a study to measure Dungeness crab mating success in three regions of Puget Sound. Female crabs were collected during October in Hood Canal, the Everett area, and off West Beach (Whidbey Island). All three sites showed that the largest females captured showed signs of recent mating. This detail is important because female Dungeness crabs generally mate with males that are larger than themselves, which suggests that large males are present at all three sites

in sufficient quantities to mate with the complete size range of mature females. Additional analysis is ongoing to determine trends in mating success among sites within locations. This study will be repeated in September and October of 2008 to begin examining inter-seasonal variation in mating success.

**Title: Grays Harbor Basin and Infectious Hematopoietic Necrosis Virus (IHNV) –**

Until 2007 adult salmon and steelhead returning to the Department hatcheries from the rivers draining into the Grays Harbor Basin had tested negative for IHNV. Beginning in March 2007, IHNV was detected in returning adult winter steelhead at the Skookumchuck Hatchery. Since that initial detection, IHNV has been detected in: adult summer and winter steelhead, fall chinook, and chum salmon returning to the Lake Aberdeen Hatchery; adult coho and winter steelhead returning to the Humptulips Hatchery; and has been identified as the cause of epidemics in rainbow trout being reared at Satsop Springs and Lake Aberdeen hatcheries and in juvenile steelhead at the Bingham Creek Hatchery. These IHNV isolations have greater implications to existing programs because juvenile steelhead are often reared on surface waters at facilities in the Chehalis and Humptulips River basins and there are a number of cooperative projects that rely on egg transfers from these facilities to out-of-basin waters.

**Title: Study will Compare Survival Between Barged and In-River Migrant Fall Chinook in the Snake River –**

Final agreement was reached in December among Columbia/Snake River researchers for a PIT tagging study designed to compare survival between barged (transported) and in-river migrant Snake River fall chinook. Hatchery chinook from the Lyons Ferry Hatchery will be reared at a series of state and federal hatcheries to a size that mimics wild migrating subyearling fall chinook. These hatchery "surrogates" will be PIT tagged and randomly assigned to transportation or in-river migration. When adults return, detections of the PIT tags at Columbia and Snake River dams will allow researchers to monitor their return survival without handling the fish. About 328,000 surrogate and another 250,000 hatchery fish will be tagged starting in spring 2008 and each subsequent year for up to five years. All these fish are to be released above Lower Granite Dam, the uppermost of the four lower Snake River dams.

**Title: Pilot Project Considered** –Habitat staff and our Legislative Liason were invited to meet with Senator Dan Swecker to discuss new ways to encourage local land use planning that employs agency technical assistance and science-based analysis tools, such as local habitat assessment and watershed characterization. The Senator is interested in new approaches to achieving critical area protection while meeting economic development needs. Staff is continuing to work with the Senator and other state agencies to scope a potential pilot project fueled by planning and analysis tools used successfully in the Birch Bay watershed planning project in Whatcom County. A possible outcome is additional funding for the Department and other state agency technical assistance so we can maximize the use of our watershed and habitat characterization/analysis tools in local planning.

**Title: Wolverine Research, Okanogan District-**

The project tallied its first capture of the season. Staff caught a new and very healthy 31.5 lb. adult male wolverine in the Hart's Pass trap on Friday, January 26, 2008, less than a day after the trap had been opened. Staff named the latest study animal Rocky in honor of Rocky Spencer, Wildlife 885. We thought it was fitting since Rocky was always a champion of

carnivores, making sure to share with the public the truth about this engaging, yet often misunderstood, portion of our natural history.